



Wisconsin State Fair Park

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March 13, 2009

Secretary Busalacchi
Department of Transportation
Hills Farms State
Transportation Building
4802 Sheboygan Avenue
P.O. Box 7910
Madison, WI 53707-7910

Ms. Donna Brown
Department of Transportation
141 NW Barstow Street
Waukesha, WI 53187

Mr. Brad Heimlich
CH2M Hill
135 S. 84th Street, Suite 325
Milwaukee, WI 53214

Dear Secretary Busalacchi, Ms. Brown and Mr. Heimlich:

Thank you for meeting with the Wisconsin State Fair Park Board (Board) and for meeting several times with State Fair Park managers to discuss possible designs for the east end of the Zoo Interchange project. While its concerns have been raised during discussions, as requested, the Board is submitting a formal response to your design plans.

At present, the Department of Transportation (DOT) has narrowed the field of designs to two – M1 Alternative and M3 Alternative. Of the two designs, the Board greatly favors the M3 Alternative. Nevertheless, without very substantial mitigation efforts on the part of DOT, construction of even the preferred design would irreparably harm the Wisconsin State Fair and State Fair Park. To understand the Board's preference, please consider the importance of the property along Interstate 94 and the current access and traffic flow to and around the Fair Park to the success of the Wisconsin State Fair and State Fair Park.

Any State Fair Park Property Taken Must Be Replaced

While the Board understands that lost parking and event space appears less damaging than the destruction of homes and office buildings, the importance of the property along Interstate 94 to the Wisconsin State Fair and State Fair Park cannot be overstated. The loss of access into the State Fair from the north and the elimination of the most valuable parking would truly threaten the continued viability of the Wisconsin State Fair. The implications are numerous and ultimately could result in a spiraling decline in attendance and, thus, profitability of the 11-day Wisconsin State Fair as revenue significantly declines from the loss of parking, admission, food and beverage sales. Further, the Board would experience a significant decline in revenue garnered from the property throughout the rest of the year from special event programming and parking.

At the most basic level of concern, the M1 Alternative and M3 Alternative designs result in a substantial loss of parking and prime event space. The Board much prefers the M3 Alternative Design because it requires less Fair Park property and leads to the loss of less revenue.

- Under the M1 Alternative, DOT would take approximately 5.5 acres of State Fair Park's north lot and 750 parking spaces. The Fair Park would lose at least \$175,000 annually, \$145,000 of parking profit and \$30,000 of event profit.
- Under the M3 Alternative, DOT would take approximately 4.0 acres of State Fair Park's north lot and 550 parking spaces. The Fair Park would lose at least \$135,000 annually, \$105,000 of parking profit and \$30,000 of event profit.

However, this loss is only the beginning of our concerns. As noted above, the ripple effect of more difficult access and lost parking to the State Fair cannot easily be calculated but could ultimately lead to the end the Wisconsin State Fair. For example, under the M1 Alternative Design, an estimated initial loss in attendance of 58,000 is very possible with a corresponding loss in admission, food, beverage, and retail sales revenue of \$700,000 or more. An ever eroding, terminal pattern could easily emerge as entertainment and agriculture programming decrease to match decreasing revenues as a result of declining attendance. Less entertainment and agriculture programming could then lead to additional decreases in attendance, which would then lead to additional cuts in entertainment and agricultural programming, and so on.

The Board expects DOT to provide substitute parking on-site or closely nearby for any parking lost as a result of the property taken for the Zoo Interchange project. There are viable options that DOT has been notified of that would address this issue, but the options are time sensitive and need to be addressed immediately. For example, several months ago, a Fair Park official informed DOT about a 5.0 acre parcel close by that could act as a staging area for the Zoo Interchange project construction and ultimately provide a partial or total offset for the property taken along Interstate 94 from State Fair Park. In addition, the Board expects DOT to compensate it for the difference in the value of property taken and that of the replacement property as well as replacing and relocating the electronic sign that provides the Fair Park valuable revenue and necessary advertising of events because of its location near Interstate 94.

Efficient and Safe Access to State Fair Park Must Be Maintained

The M3 Alternative Design maintains the 84th Street exit ramp, which the Board believes is absolutely necessary for access and proper traffic flow around the Fair Park during the Wisconsin State Fair and for other events throughout the year operating on the Fair Park. As part of this design, the Board recommends that DOT add a tertiary ramp or exit ramp that would provide northern access to the Fair Park. Current designs eliminate the Fair Park's Gate 7 entrance road. Keeping the 84th street ramp and access to the Fair Park's Gate 7 are essential to avoid traffic back-ups and allow northern access to one of the Fair Park's largest parking areas and its main gate.

The most significant concern with the M1 Alternative Design is that drivers traveling east on the interstate would no longer have a convenient exit onto 84th Street. Rather, drivers would have to exit Interstate 94 using a Texas U-turn included in the design, which would allow them to either travel eight additional blocks and exit onto 76th street, which is primarily residential and not built to handle the volume of traffic that now exits onto 84th street, or to travel a 16 block u-turn (down to 76th Street and back to 84th street) to exit onto 84th street. Because intersection turns during the Wisconsin State Fair are restricted to go in only in one direction, exiting off the Texas U-turn onto 84th street would be counter to traffic flow.

Without maintaining the 84th Street ramp, long back-ups would be expected at the Fair Park's Gate 8, Gate 9 and Gate 1. Intersections at North Street and 76th Street, West Greenfield and 76th Street and West Greenfield and 77th Street would be expected to be blocked for periods each day of the Wisconsin State Fair. All of the efforts taken by West Allis and the Fair Park over the years to keep traffic flowing and avoid severe congestion in the neighborhoods surrounding the Fair Park would be to no avail. Increased accidents and frustrated drivers would ultimately lead to lower State Fair attendance and higher traffic control costs. Similar problems throughout the year could be expected for visitors to other events operated by the State Fair Park, Wisconsin Exposition Center, Milwaukee Mile and Pettit National Ice Center.

Efficient and Safe Access During Construction Must Also Be Maintained

The Board expects DOT to take whatever steps would be necessary to maintain safe and convenient travel to the annual Wisconsin State Fair during the construction phase. Similar to steps taken during the construction of the Marquette Interchange, the Fair Park Board expects that DOT would make street improvements and adjust lights to improve street level traffic flow. The Board also expects that DOT would underwrite the cost of freeway flyers for bus routes utilizing Interstates 94, 45, 894 and Highway 100; restrict interstate lane closures to overnight hours; and provide adequate public information and education on the project's progress and best driving choices.

The Board appreciates DOT's efforts to improve the safety of travel along Interstate 94. However, without responsible planning decisions and appropriate mitigation efforts on DOT's part, the Wisconsin State Fair will suffer and could eventually die. The Board is charged with doing what is necessary to protect one of Wisconsin's premier family events and tourist attractions. Assuming adequate mitigation efforts by DOT, the M3 Alternative provides the desired safety improvements for interstate travel as well as providing a reasonable opportunity for the Wisconsin State Fair to continue as now. The Board would also appreciate it if DOT modifies the M3 Alternative Design to reduce or eliminate the need to take residential homes to construct interstate improvements. This would ensure a positive outcome for all.

We look forward to meeting with Secretary Busalacchi on March 26 to discuss these matters. Thank you for seriously considering the Wisconsin State Fair Park Board's position. We look forward to participating fully in the end stages of your planning process. If you have any questions about the Board's position prior to our meeting, please contact me at (262) 574-6302.

Respectfully submitted,



Susan Crane, Chairperson
Wisconsin State Fair Park Board

cc: Wisconsin State Fair Park Board of Directors
Kelli Trumble, Secretary, Department of Tourism
Rod Nilsestuen, Secretary, Department of Agriculture, Trade, and Consumer Protection
Craig Barkelar, Deputy Executive Director, Wisconsin State Fair Park